Got Some

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"**Hey, there's an open gun!"** Spotting an abandoned M240G machine gun during a fam-fire shoot, a corporal and a PFC hurried to claim their discovery. A belt of ammo was lying on the ground next to the weapon; they picked it up, loaded it, aimed at a target, and fired.

The corporal fired a burst and released the trigger, but the gun kept firing—a runaway. Startled by the unexpected explosion of rounds, he loosened his grip, and the gun began to jump out of control. To make matters worse, the ammunition belt, dragging across the ground, tugged the machine gun and pivoted it to the left.

Watching the muzzle swing toward him, the PFC (who was serving as the impromptu A-gunner) jumped up and scrambled to get out of the way. Two rounds tore into his left forearm before he rolled out of the line of fire. The gun continued to fire and bounce to the left until it tipped over, rotating 90 degrees. Now the gun was firing down the firing line toward several firing positions. Another gun team and an armorer were working on a .50-cal machine gun. One round hit the armorer's left leg. Another struck a gun-team member's wallet, which was in his back pocket.

When the dust settled, the runaway machine gun had put two Marines in the hospital and caused $622 worth of damage to an adjacent 240G barrel, T&E mechanism and tripod.

So how did this happen? It turns out that the runaway gun had run away while another team was firing it earlier in the day. The first team halted the gun without incident and reported it to the RSO, who ordered the Marines on the line not to use it. Unfortunately, not all the Marines on the range were present on the firing line when the first runaway took place. No one thought to tag the weapon or to remove it from the gun line.

The post-mishap limited technical inspection (LTI) found that the weapon was unserviceable and shouldn't have been issued. Several parts, including the weapon's sear, drive spring, firing pin, and safety, were unservice-

able. Had a thorough pre-fire inspection been done, the mishap likely would have been prevented. Machine-gun parts can break and cause a runaway gun at any time; Marines must be taught and prepared to stop one.

The investigation found that not all Marines had attended the mandatory range brief, and many had missed the misfire and runaway-gun instructions. Though adequate numbers of officers and staff NCOs were on the range, no one was controlling firing positions, and weapons frequently were left unattended. This allowed some Marines to approach, man and fire weapons with no supervision.

A fam-fire range usually involves untrained gunners. Not giving them thorough instructions and supervision, and allowing them to fire from bipods instead of tripods, may prove too great a challenge for them.

If you find yourself in a similar situation, you have three options:

1. The best option, if a few rounds remain in the belt, is to let the rounds fire out. This allows the gunner to keep the weapon under control using both hands. If you are the gunner, do not attempt the following methods unless you have the gun under control!

2. Twist the belt. The team leader or A-gunner should do this so the gunner can focus on controlling the weapon. This is especially critical if you are firing from a bipod. Twisting causes "mis-feed," a quick and effective way to halt the gun. Press the heel of your hand against the back of the belt, push forward and up while twisting backward. Don't be timid. The feed mechanism of an M240 can lift approximately 20 pounds. Twisting the belt binds and overpowers it, causing a jam. The belt may break, but doing so allows all the rounds ahead of the break to feed into the gun and fire. As the Marines in this mishap discovered when they grabbed the belt, the gun kept firing, and, since the gun wasn't mounted on a tripod, it jerked left and tipped over. The MBST is the only source I've seen that specifically warns of this possibility when firing from a bipod. Twisting the belt is not always the best option, and some machine gunners don't have the luxury of a crew to help them operate the weapon. Some vehicle co-axial mounts are remote or use feed-chute systems, which make it impossible for a gunner to access or reach the belt.

3. The third option is to pull the charging handle to the rear. Since your right hand is only inches from the charging handle, this is the quickest, simplest way to stop the gun. Aside from letting the belt fire out, this is often the best method and will work with all M240-series machine guns. To do this, with an M249 or M240G, hold the stock in your shoulder with your left hand, let go of the pistol grip, grab the charging handle, jerk it back sharply, and hold it there. This halts firing, as it keeps the bolt from moving forward to feed or fire. Stopping a runaway with this method requires a firm grip since the handle may pulse when it collides with the forward-moving operating rod. Once the bolt is fully to the rear, hold it back. Do not let go, as the sear and safety may be damaged and may not be able to hold the op rod. With your left hand, remove the ammunition belt, and clear the gun before allowing the bolt to ride forward.